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**Circular Letter: DHCQ 15-10-642**

**TO:** Acute Care Hospitals: Chief Executive Officers, Emergency Preparedness Personnel

**FROM:** Eric Sheehan, JD, Interim Director  
Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Sheehan".

Mary E. Clark, JD, MPH, Director  
Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management

**SUBJECT:** Mass Casualty Patient Tracking Protocol

**DATE:** October 1, 2015

This Circular Letter is intended to establish the Patient Tracking Protocol (Protocol) to be followed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the American Red Cross of Massachusetts (Red Cross), and receiving hospitals to track patients in the event there is a mass casualty incident (MCI) in the Commonwealth. This Protocol will be activated only in the event of a mass casualty incident as described in this document.

**Background**

If there is a mass casualty incident that results in the transport of injured individuals to multiple hospitals within or outside the Commonwealth, there will be a need for timely and accurate information about their whereabouts in order to facilitate family reunification efforts. The DPH has the authority to collect and maintain a central listing of personal health information (PHI) about individuals injured in such a MCI. Hospitals may, in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), release PHI to DPH for the purposes of supporting family reunification and notification. The DPH and Red Cross have mutual, overlapping, and complementary interests, and have a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to work together to undertake appropriate family reunification and notification efforts, if needed.

**Patient Tracking Procedures**

In the event there is a MCI that results in the transport of injured individuals to multiple hospitals within or outside the Commonwealth, the Commissioner of Public Health (Commissioner) or her designee may authorize activation of the Patient Tracking Protocol under the oversight of DPH. Once the Commissioner has activated the Protocol, a severe level Health and Homeland Alert Network (HHAN) alert will be sent immediately to notify all hospital emergency preparedness coordinators and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

DPH, in collaboration with receiving hospitals, and the Red Cross will coordinate collection of pre-identified patient identification information in order to create a single centralized listing of injured individuals and to support necessary family reunification and notification efforts.

Pre-designated personnel at each receiving hospital outside of Boston will submit patient information via secure fax for all disaster-affected transported patients to the Patient Tracking Unit at the DPH Department Operations Center (DOC). Boston Hospitals will submit their information to the BPHC Medical Intelligence Center (MIC) which will then forward its information to the DOC. (See below for Boston Hospital protocol). The Patient Tracking Unit will maintain and update as necessary the central list of all disaster-affected patients received by hospitals.

The Red Cross will place its trained personnel at the DOC. Red Cross personnel will enter the information provided by the Patient Tracking Unit into the secure Red Cross Patient Connection web form. The patient information to be provided by hospitals and the MIC to DPH is limited to the following:

1. First and Last Name
2. Patient Identification Number (if assigned)
3. Date of Birth
4. Gender
5. Nationality (if known)
6. Patient location and hospital contact information

The Red Cross will staff a call center within one hour after notification by DPH that the Protocol has been activated, and will establish and advertise a dedicated toll-free telephone line for calls from the public seeking information about individuals who may have been injured. Patient Connection and family reunification may also occur at a physical reception center or family assistance center, if one is established.

For all mass casualty incidents the Red Cross will collect the following information from people seeking to locate an individual who may have been transported to a hospital:

Information collected from seeker about <b>individual sought</b>	Information collected about the <b>seeker</b>
First and Last Name	First and Last name
DOB or age	Relationship
Gender	Primary phone number

When the resources of time and manpower allow, the Red Cross will collect the following additional information from people seeking to locate an individual who may have been transported to a hospital:

Information collected from seeker about <b>individual sought</b>	Information collected about the <b>seeker</b>
Primary language	Alternate phone number
Nickname	When did you last have contact?
Nationality or ethnicity	Have you checked with others?
Hair color	Why do you believe that the individual was affected by the incident?
Eye color	
Description (e.g., height, weight, identifying marks, etc.)	

Trained Red Cross personnel will enter into Patient Connection details about the sought person and the seeker. Patient Connection will use a simple match-finding feature, and a designated Red Cross person/team will check seeker/sought comparisons to find and verify all potential matches.

Return calls will be made by trained Red Cross personnel once a confirmed match has been made, and will provide only information about the injured individual's location and the appropriate hospital point of contact for the seeker. The Red Cross will not release any information about patient condition, and will not share information with any other organization, entity, or individual except as specified by DPH.

If the Red Cross is unable to make a confirmed match for an individual transported to a hospital, the Red Cross will notify DPH, and provide all information regarding that transported individual. The Red Cross shall also provide all information received from seekers that cannot be matched to any individual transported to a hospital following a MCI.

The Red Cross will forward to DPH all requests for information outside of family reunification or notification regarding foreign nationals.

### **Boston Hospital Protocol for Mass Casualty Patient Tracking**

In the event the DPH Commissioner or her designee authorizes activation of the Patient Tracking Protocol, Boston hospitals will send information to the MIC via EMTrack or pre-designated secure methods as described below. The MIC will coordinate with DPH on behalf of Boston hospitals. The protocol in Boston states that EMS will utilize triage tags on all patients transported from the scene. Please note that if a MCI occurs outside of the City of Boston and patients are transported to Boston hospitals, they may not have a triage tag.

For any patient that presents without a triage tag, the hospital should use a blue and white patient tracking wristband and track that patient under the incident in EMTrack .

In the event EMTrack is not available or there are technical difficulties with inputting information into EMTrack, Boston hospitals will send the information identified above to the MIC for each patient at their facility via secure fax at (617) 343-6930, via telephone at (617) 343-6920, or via secure, encrypted email to mic@bphc.org.

The Healthcare System Branch Director position, usually staffed by the COBTH Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, in the MIC will be the lead for receiving, synthesizing, and sharing this information with appropriate partners, including DPH as part of the statewide Mass Casualty Patient Tracking Protocol.

### **Completion of Family Reunification and Notification**

Family reunification and notification efforts will be considered complete when the earlier of these actions occurs: (a) the Commissioner or her designee terminates activation of the Patient Tracking Protocol, or (b) the Red Cross confirms to DPH that Red Cross personnel have completed or attempted to complete family reunification or has notified the appropriate consulate about every positively-identified individual on the DPH centralized list of individuals injured and transported to a hospital as a result of a mass casualty incident.

Once the family reunification and notification efforts are considered complete, a severe level HHAN alert will be sent to notify all hospital emergency preparedness coordinators and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

**For additional information please contact:**

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